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Viewing cable 09MANAGUA37, NICARAGUA: SAINTS AND SYMBOLS IN MUNICIPAL

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09MANAGUA37**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09MANAGUA37	2009-01-13 18:36	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758468.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758464.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4102/estrada-y-la-ldquo-doble-cara-rdquo-ante-ee-uu>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3966/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-ee-uu-en-el-2006>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2758764.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2758753.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4041/millones-de-dolares-sin-control-y-a-discrecion>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4040/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-venezuela-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4047/rodrigo-barreto-enviado-de-ldquo-vacaciones-rdquo>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2757239.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2746658.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2757244.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2746673.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3991/dra-yadira-centeno-desmiente-cable-diplomatico-eeuu>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3968/pellas-pronostico-a-eeuu-victoria-de-ortega-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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PP RUEHLMC RUEHROV
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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3619
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 0153
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL//J2/J3/J5// PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 000037

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR KRAAIMORE
DEPT FOR USOAS
DEPT FOR DRL AND IRF
DEPT FOR WHA/CEN AND INR/IAA
STATE FOR USAID-LAC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/12/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: NICARAGUA: SAINTS AND SYMBOLS IN MUNICIPAL
ELECTIONS

REF: A. MANAGUA 1393 AND PREVIOUS
[1](#)B. MANAGUA 1343

Classified By: Amb. Robert J. Callahan for reasons 1.4 (b & d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: President Daniel Ortega appears to be trying to use religious symbolism for political purposes, as part of his effort to consolidate control in Nicaragua. After following a strategy of co-opting Evangelical symbols in the Citizen Power Councils (CPCs) "prayer against hatred" campaign (see REF B), the CPCs appropriated sacred symbols from the Catholic faith in an attempt to attract wider Catholic support for the Sandinista National Liberation Front party (FSLN) in the weeks after the November 7 municipal elections. However, the government plan may have back-fired; the Catholic Church's Conference of Bishops has spoken out vehemently against the unauthorized use and manipulation of its sacred symbols by political forces as well as the lack of transparency by the government in the recent election. These strong statements by the Catholic Church may have brought the Church into the crosshairs of chief propagandist and First Lady Rosario Murillo. This may make the Catholic Church the next target in Ortega's continuing program of intimidation against Nicaraguan civil society. END SUMMARY

Campaign of Prayer for Evangelicals

[1](#)2. (C) As reported previously (see REF B), the campaign of "prayer against hatred" has been a faux-religious protest, instigated and financed through the CPCs controlled by First Lady Rosario Murillo. Borrowing primarily from Evangelical traditions of public prayer circles, protestors join hands to "pray against hatred" several times during the day. In its original concept, the prayer campaign may have been aimed at attracting participation from the growing and politically active Evangelical community in Nicaragua. It has since become principally a measure to keep Sandinista control of Managua's traffic circles, strategic points for suffocating protests in the city. Yet, even in the months leading up to the November 9 municipal elections, President Ortega's relationship with religious leaders, especially Evangelical Christians, appeared cozier than ever before. Media reported that Ortega handed out land titles to church leaders, quoted Bible passages for visiting Evangelical leaders, inaugurated a Bible Plaza in downtown Managua and may have made Nicaragua

the first country in the world to declare a "National Day to Honor the Bible." Even Murillo courted the Evangelicals by proclaiming during a meeting with Evangelicals that "Nicaragua is moving towards the establishment of God,s Earthly kingdom." (COMMENT: Weeks after the elections, the bright pink and yellow political billboards in Managua were changed to proclaim: "To fulfill the will of the people is fulfilling the will of God." The "will of the people" that is also the "will of God" implied by these billboards is, of course, the dubious election results. END COMMENT)

Cozying Up To Catholics

13. (C) The prayer against hatred campaign lacked overt Catholic symbols and support, in a country that is predominately Catholic. This changed on November 13, four days after the municipal elections, when images of the Virgin Mary were suddenly installed in all of the major rotundas in Managua overnight by youth wearing the president's "Program Amor" tee-shirts. (NOTE: The images or statues of the Virgin Mary are approximately three-feet tall and are mounted on a three-foot tall, white cinder-block, square pedestals that were quickly cemented in-place. The images of the Virgin Mary in a blue robe with two cherub angels at her feet are traditionally displayed during the Purisima celebration in December. END NOTE) The statues were installed without permission from the Managua mayor's office and against the will of the Catholic Church. Managua Vice Mayor Felipe Neri Leiva reported to the press that no one asked for permission to install the statues and those responsible "are promoting

MANAGUA 00000037 002 OF 003

total anarchy... because they are not complying with the laws and decrees that regulate the city." We believe that the images were installed by the CPCs who wanted to create the impression of wider Catholic support for the prayer campaign and the FSLN party.

Sacred Symbols Vandalized and Manipulated

14. (C) During the post-election violence (see REF A), the images of the Virgin Mary were attacked and manipulated for political purposes. On November 18, an image of the Virgin Mary in the Central American rotunda was vandalized with red paint poured over the face and hands of the statue that looked like blood. Other images of the Virgin Mary had FSLN red and black flags placed on them, or had red and black bandanas placed over the head of the statue during FSLN victory rallies. On November 25, an image of the Virgin Mary was severely vandalized - the head and face of the Virgin Mary were completely broken off and the statue body was knocked off its white cinder block pedestal. Witnesses claimed that Sandinista party supporters were responsible for the vandalism, however, the Sandinista controlled Channel Four television station claimed that the opposition supporters desecrated the images. On November 26, unidentified workers installed new statues of the Virgin Mary to replace the vandalized ones, reportedly under presidential orders. (COMMENT: Ironically, the "prayer against hatred" participants who are in the Managua rotundas 24/7 claim that they never saw the perpetrators of any of the acts of vandalism against the statues. END COMMENT)

Catholic Conference Condemns; Calls for Calm

15. (C) Until recently, the Catholic Church - once the Sandinista government,s strongest political opponent in the 1980s - seemed willing to go along with Ortega,s use of religious icons and language in exchange for other concessions: a ban on therapeutic abortions, public recognition of the church,s leadership in communities, and even financial help for patron saint festivals and the Catholic university. However, the Catholic Church has grown

increasingly concerned with the government's use of religious symbols for political purposes. Nicaragua's Conference of bishops ("Conference") has started to take a more active role in addressing the current political turmoil, following the blatant electoral fraud of the November 9 municipal elections. On November 11 the bishops expressed their support for an election recount. When the images of the Virgin Mary appeared in the rotundas, the Catholic Church immediately voiced its strong disapproval and called for the government to remove them. On November 13 the Conference stated that it could not passively allow Catholic symbols and language manipulated for political purposes, referring to the images of the Virgin Mary installed in all of the Managua rotundas as part of the ongoing "prayer against hate" campaign. The Conference called for an end to political violence that threatened to open old wounds, healed over during the past 16 years of democracy. In the place of violence, the Conference called for political leaders to exhaust all constitutional, legal and democratic recourses to find a solution. After the incidences of severe vandalism against the images of the Virgin Mary, the spokesperson for the Archbishop of Nicaragua, Rolando Alvarez, called again on the mayor of Managua to immediately remove the statues.

Orteguistas Cry Foul
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¶6. (C) Following the Conference's press statements, Orteguistas accused the Church of instigating the violence. National Assembly Deputy and FSLN party member Gustavo Porras announced his disagreement with the Catholic Church participating in politics, stating instead that the church "should be only devoted to spiritual affairs." Porras also publicly criticized Bishop Silvio Montenegro for

MANAGUA 00000037 003 OF 003

participating in opposition rally on November 18. Emmet Lang, the Vice President of the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) and a Sandinista leader, accused the church of committing a "mortal sin" and "instigating violence" for pointing out election irregularities and demanding a clear and transparent result. Even the FSLN weekly publication "El 19" criticized the Conference's press release in an editorial that claimed that the Catholic Church is "responding to foreign interests and the opposition...and this is financed by foreign governments to destabilize the Ortega government."

COMMENT
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¶7. (C) The Catholic Church is clearly under growing criticism and pressure in FSLN-controlled media. With a fractured opposition and a civil society in retreat because of organized government-sponsored witch-hunt against NGOs that support democracy, the Catholic Church may be the only institution that could mount an effective national campaign against the Ortega government's authoritarian tendencies. It seems likely that the manipulation and desecration of Catholic religious symbols is designed to provoke a wider confrontation between the FSLN-controlled government and the Catholic Church, which were arch enemies in the 1980's, and to stop the Church from mounting a more effective challenge to Ortega.

CALLAHAN